

Robinson Mortuary
1216-1218 Broadway
Hannibal
Marion County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1251

HABS
MO,
64-HANIB,
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ROBINSON MORTUARY

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Location: 1216-1218 Broadway
E 15' of Lot 6 and all of Lot 7,
Smashey's Subdivision of O.L. 96
Hannibal
Marion County
Missouri

Date of Construction: 1910

Present Owner: Edward E. Robinson
2105 Spruce
Hannibal, Missouri 63401

Present Use: Mortuary and Residence

Significance: Several of the most important strands of
black history in Hannibal converge in
this building.

Historian: Esley Hamilton
Hannibal Arts Council
June, 1980

HISTORY:

The United Brothers (or Brethren) of Friendship was a Negro fraternal organization very active in Hannibal at the turn of the century. St. Paul Lodge No. 3 of the U.B.F. bought this site in 1906 for \$2250 under trustees William Smith, George A. Williams and Thomas Caleston. In 1910, trustees Cyrus McDowell, William J. Hawkins and William M. Lawson borrowed \$4000 from Jesse McVeigh, a wealthy local lumberman, and built this building. It was designed by James T. Brown, who had come from Jefferson City where he had taught at Lincoln University. He was associated with Angus McElroy in a transfer business from 1909, but in the 1911 city directory, he was listed as an architect. In successive directories he was a carpenter, laborer, and transfer man, and by 1918, he had become the sole proprietor of Brown's Transfer. He was active in the affairs of the black community until his death in 1947, serving as president of the local branch of the NAACP from its reorganization in 1939. J. T. Brown and Son Moving and Storage is now one of the two oldest family-owned black businesses in Missouri.

A variety of black-owned businesses occupied the two storefronts beginning with William Allen & Son grocers in 1911 and Thomas C. Ross druggist in 1912. In 1918, W. L. Meyers opened an undertaking establishment at #1218, and it was taken over by George E. Roberts about 1921. Roberts had been a steward at the exclusive Labinnah Club in 1918, then apprenticed to Roy Schwartz, a white undertaker whose business still operates in Hannibal. Roberts Funeral Home

operated at 1218 Broadway until 1965, when it was purchased by Edward E. Robinson. Roberts was appointed by the governor to the board of curators of Lincoln University in 1954.

The U.B.F. had a women's affiliate, the Sisters of the Mysterious Ten, with three chapters in Hannibal; St. Elizabeth Temple No. 3; Glittering Crown Temple No. 10; and A. D. Gibson Temple No. 27. In 1930, each of these groups was given a three-twentieths interest in this property. In 1936, with dwindling membership, St. Paul Lodge merged with the three women's groups to form the Hannibal Workers. By 1965, only six members survived: Lillian Mayfield, Daisy Tinsley, Elizabeth Bell, Ethyl Jackson, Sis Woodall Ellis, and Sylvester C. Robinson. Robinson was the father of Edward E. Robinson and the nephew of Lee Robinson, who in 1921, had established the three and one-half acre Robinson Cemetery on Clark St. This replaced the now-abandoned Old Baptist Cemetery as the chief place of burial for black residents of Hannibal. The six surviving members sold their interest to Edward E. Robinson, who thus consolidated ownership of both business and building.

THE BUILDING:

The building is flanked by one- and two-story commercial buildings, those to the east now vacant. It faces the triangular plot known as "the wedge" recently cleared by the city. This area at the junction of Broadway and Market Street was a thriving business area at the turn of the century, in competition with the downtown ten blocks to the east.

Two store fronts form the wide east and west bays, which have triple windows in floors above. Narrow center bay has double doors opening onto stairway to upper floors. First-floor openings have iron lintels decorated with rosettes. Windows have segmented arches, wooden frames, double-hung sash. Brickwork is embellished on upper floors with pilaster strips, square coffers between second and third floor, and broad frieze at top. Third floor extends back only to second bay on side and has a frame rear wall covered with asphalt shingles. The interior is largely remodeled. Meeting room on second floor has been replaced by apartments, which have not been finished due to uncertainty as to building's future.

PROJECT INFORMATION:

Plans call for the demolition of the Robinson Mortuary Building in the Summer of 1982. The demolition is required for an urban redevelopment program in the City of Hannibal which calls for extension of Grand Avenue from Center Street to Broadway Avenue along with the development of a National Super Market on the north-east corner of Broadway and Grand Avenues.

PRINCIPAL REFERENCES

J. Hurley Hagood and Roberta Hagood, The Story of Hannibal, Hannibal:
Standard Printing Co., 1976.

Title Abstracts

City Directory

Hiawatha (Mrs. James) Crow, historian, Eighth and Center Streets
Baptist Church.

Jeff T. Brown, grandson of James T. Brown

Hannibal Courier-Post, May 11, 1954.